

# Executive Update



A special update for Idaho conservation leaders ♦ Spring 2004

## Conservation Statistics

### 2003 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) accomplishments:

- ♦ 354 contracts statewide
- ♦ 164,000 acres protected

EQIP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, is administered by NRCS.



*Idaho Senator Larry Craig speaks in support of the Fuels for Schools Program in Council, ID.*

*The Panhandle Lakes Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council is working statewide with a private consultant, the USDA Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Lands to establish two demonstration schools for wood chip heating systems.*

*"This is a great private and public partnership," says **Kim Golden**, RC&D coordinator. "It will reduce wildfire potential, help the schools save money and promote the local economy."*

*RC&Ds are a USDA program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).*

## Partnership Saves Historical Site

Sometimes rivers possess a mind of their own. Case in point: the Snake River on the Fort Hall Reservation in eastern Idaho.

Members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have watched the river carve away three foot of soil annually toward the original Fort Hall site, a stopping place along the Oregon Trail and now a national historical monument. The area contains sacred burial grounds and cultural artifacts.

Now a partnership between the Tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is using BOR cost share, Farm Bill programs and newer bioengineering techniques to protect the site.

"This is a demonstration to show Tribal members we can nudge the river back using natural means," says Sam Hernandez, BIA engineer in Fort Hall.

The bioengineering practices include log jams and rock barbs to

slow the water, create eddies and stabilize the bank. A Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) contract provided fencing to remove cattle from the banks. The Tribe also submitted an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract this year for planting willows and native grasses.

"I'm proud of what we've done," Hernandez says. "We have something on the ground and, hopefully, it will evolve into natural habitat over time."

Laverne Bronco, environmental liaison for the Tribes, says the project offers an educational opportunity.

"We can have the kids from the Tribe plant the willows," he says. "It will be our chance to explain why willows are important to the river and to our culture. We will also be able to show them how to care for this land. It's our home and our future."



**Kurt Cates**, NRCS district conservationist in Fort Hall, visits with **Sam Hernandez** and **Laverne Bronco** at the Fort Hall National Monument.



*Upriver of the Fort Hall National Monument. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are working with NRCS and others to use bioengineering to stop the erosion.*



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## Conservationist's Corner



Richard Sims  
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### NRCS Offers More Involvement Than Ever

In October, I will celebrate five years as State Conservationist. I am impressed with the growth of our partnership and how Idaho's natural resources are benefiting from our positive working relationships.

In the next five years, I envision even more success. Never before, have NRCS programs offered more flexibility. We as a conservation partnership have the unprecedented opportunity to shape our programs and address the most critical conservation needs both at the state and local level.

This gives us the ability to address special needs when they arise. A good example: our recent actions to assist producers affected by the drought in Jerome and Gooding counties.

I encourage all of you to be involved in the decision-making process. It is critical we have local input driving our federal programs. Spend time visiting with local SWCDs, producer groups and special interest groups. Help advise the USDA Local Work Groups. At the statewide level, provide input to me and the State Technical Advisory Committee, think of ways we can pool resources into joint ventures.

I am excited and inspired by what we might accomplish for Idaho's natural resources in the coming years.



### WHIP Project in Caribou County.

Producer Kent Clegg used the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to construct two ponds, and improve water quality and wildlife habitat. He created a settling pond to reduce sediments in his surface water and a second larger pond to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl.

"Kent is a very productive farmer," says **Larry Mickelson**, NRCS district conservationist for Soda Springs and Montpelier. "He's interested in doing new and innovative things to make farming work for him."

## 49 Drain Wells Down and Nine to Go

Minidoka County is almost done with a project requiring help from several agencies and dozens of producers.

The Minidoka Land and Water Management Project (the A&B Project) is only nine drain wells from completion. Forty-nine have been closed to date.

The flood irrigation systems once used by many producers required a drain well for overflows. Well tests in the late 1990s found nitrate levels above safe standards in 24 percent of the wells, pesticide residue in 81 percent, a coliform bacteria count in 63 percent, and an estimated 9,000 tons of sediment entering into the aquifer annually. This created immediate concern for Southern Idaho's drinking water.

**Julie Thomas**, Mid-Snake RC&D coordinator, worked with **Congressman Mike Simpson's** office, the Minidoka County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Bureau of Reclamation, A&B Irrigation District and NRCS, to create an EQIP project to address the wells without burdening agricultural producers.

"Congressman Simpson was impressed with the need to lower nitrate levels in the aquifer," says **Charles Barnes**, the Congressman's

agricultural field director. "He appreciates the help of the NRCS and that the project is on schedule."

About 100 producers are receiving financial and technical assistance to convert from flood to sprinkler irrigation. This work is one of the first times Idaho NRCS has used Technical Service Providers for irrigation designs.

"Local producers are happy," says **Patrick Evans**, NRCS district conservationist in Rupert. "Besides protecting groundwater, conversion to sprinkler systems has resulted in significant savings of energy and labor costs."



**Dan Strickler**, Minidoka County SWCD, stands in a well that is to be capped. When these wells were functioning, they produced a loud suction noise as runoff contaminated with nitrates, pesticides, bacteria and sediment rushed down into the aquifer.